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ABSTRACT

The meaning of evaluation and the steps necessary to implement it are explained to parents in this booklet. The purposes and methods of evaluating student progress, teacher capability, programs, and school and community goals are related to improvement of the educational experience as a whole. Decision making is always a result of the data collection and evaluation process. This process can be applied to any particular area or subtopic within the educational framework. (SM)

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PROJECT EVALUATION

Capitol Region Education Council

ON EVALUATION:

FOR PARENTS

Prepared by
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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of evaluation is to improve whatever is being evaluated.

This booklet is designed to explain to parents the meaning of evaluation and the steps necessary to implement it.

Some educational terms are used, and they are clarified on page 1 titled "Definition of Terms."

It is hoped that upon reading this booklet, parents will have a better understanding about evaluation.

The purpose of this booklet is to discuss with as many parents as possible the concept of evaluation. Therefore, it is hoped that the reader will give this booklet to other parents.

Philip S. Saif, Director
Project Evaluation

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Definition of Terms

Goal:

A goal is a continuing purpose that provides a sense of direction through time. A goal is general in scope and may be thought of as providing a direction or an aim for school districts to work toward.

Objective:

An objective is a measurable, desired result to be accomplished within a specified time period. It closes a gap between a present situation and a desired situation within a time frame, or in other words, fulfills a defined need.

Materials used in the classroom:

Instructional materials such as films, audio tapes, video tapes, books, filmstrips, records, etc.

* *How well is my child doing in school?*

* *How good are our teachers?*

* *Is the new course any good?*

* *How about those new materials -- are they worth the money we spent on them?*

* *How good is our school program?*

Educational evaluation can help find answers to these questions. It will not, however, provide the answers.

Evaluation employs techniques for collecting and summarizing information (data). Based on that information, decisions can be made; decisions involving not only, *"How good is it,?"* but *"How can we make it better?"* That second question is the unspoken, but clearly implied corollary of each of the questions with which we began:

"How well is my child doing in school and, if he is not achieving as well as he should, what can be done to help him do better."

"How good are our teachers and, if they need improvement, how can they become better teachers?"

"Should the new course be improved, and if so, how?"

"Are the new materials worth the money expended? Should others be used? What others?"

"How good is our school and, if it needs improvement, how would we select other materials which might have reasonable chances for success?"

In this booklet educational evaluation will be described by examining its application in some specific cases. No attempt will be made to cover all of the possible areas that might be evaluated, but these examples should indicate ways in which the techniques are used.

How well is my child doing in school?

If the concern is measuring Jimmy's physical growth, one would use some sort of yardstick -- perhaps standard height/weight tables. The

tables tell that an average 8-year-old boy weighs 70 lbs. and measures 53" tall. This is a useful piece of information. However, before deciding that Jimmy is overweight or too short, additional information is needed. Is he the son of tall, big-boned parents; or are his parents short, slender adults? Criteria related directly to Jimmy will give information that will be useful in evaluating him individually.

Similar yardsticks can be used in measuring Jimmy's progress in reading. His scores on a standardized test can be compared to the test scores for other children in his class -- telling how he compares with that group of children. Or, one can compare Jimmy's reading scores with those of all the other second-graders in town, or with all the other children in the state or nation who have taken the same standardized tests. Like the standard height / weight tables, these comparisons give an approximate idea of Jimmy's standing in comparison with other children. A better way to know Jimmy's progress in reading is by comparing *his* scores this month, with *his* scores last month. Such a comparison will yield information as to Jimmy's personal progress in mastering particular reading skills.

Now, can the use of this information help Jimmy improve his reading? Are there other measurements that will show his strengths and weaknesses in areas in which he needs extra instruction? Diagnostic testing is probably part of his teacher's regular evaluation program. It shows how far Jimmy has progressed in the particular skills he needs in reading, and is useful to the teacher in helping Jimmy master reading skills.

This testing is called criterion-referenced testing; the criteria being the various skills needed to master the subject. It measures a student's progress, step-by-step, through the criteria of the instructional program.

Information from both kinds of testing -- criterion-referenced tests and standardized achievement tests -- is used by schools. Parents and teachers want to know how the students in their schools compare with similar groups of children in the state or region. But, like the standardized height/weight tables, comparative data must be considered in light of information about the particular school before being used to make decisions for that school's program.

Standardized test scores give little information about the progress individual children have made in attaining specific skills. More specific knowledge is needed about how well a student is performing in the tasks involved in mastering the subject. Based upon this specific information, a teacher may prescribe additional needed instruction for the student.

Evaluation of Jimmy's progress in reading thus requires a variety of measurements. If the goal is to help him read as well as he is able, then those tests which yield appropriate information should be chosen, and this information should be used in designing a reading program for him. The same techniques applied to his other subjects will show his progress as a whole. Parents and teachers will know how well he is doing in relation to the standard that is appropriate for him. The information necessary to helping him improve his performance in school will be available.

How good are our teachers?

Many look upon teacher evaluation as a device simply for eliminating incompetence. In reality, evaluation must serve as a basis for strengthening competence. In short, a teacher evaluation system must provide a system which will enable the teacher to become consistently better at the thing he has been hired to do -- teach. Evaluation must be diagnostic, identifying strengths on which to build and weaknesses to be remedied.

Just as specific expectations (objectives) assist the student in learning, so they assist the teacher in setting up proper learning activities. Thus, the first task in teacher evaluation is to clarify the objectives of the instructional program. With a clear statement of what students are expected to learn, one can then determine how well they have learned.

Data on how well students have learned (which, incidently, must be collected continuously), will enable two types of teacher evaluation to take place. The first, self-evaluation, will enable the teacher to know

when it is necessary to change approaches and resources for better learning among the students.

The second, will develop some new strategies that may require assistance and direction from others. Thus fellow teachers, supervisors and in-service personnel will enter the improvement process.

Teacher evaluation will improve education when it is a continuous process, based on clearly defined objectives. When teachers and supervisors work together, the best decisions will be made about learning activities, and the chances of implementing and improving those activities will be greatly increased.

Is the new course any good?

In order to evaluate any instructional program, one needs to know, first of all, what is expected of the program -- what the specific goals are. Let us take geography as an example:

When the school started the new geography course, was the goal to save money? Or was it to teach map

skills to slow learners? Or to improve the students' use of standard reference tools? If the goal for the course is determined, collecting information to help decide how well the goal is being met is the next step.

In a course designed to teach map skills to slow learners, test scores for those skills would be gathered. Reading test scores, penmanship samples, tests of competence in mathematics, would not be needed. The information gathered must be directly related to the question of, *"What map skills have these students learned?"*

Therefore, in evaluating the geography course, one begins with a statement of goals for the course, and then collects appropriate information. With that information in hand, one can decide how well the goal is being met. A course might have more than one goal -- saving money might be one of the purposes -- so data on the costs of teaching geography before and after instituting the new program are needed. In any case, it is important that the course be judged in terms of the goals set for it.

With the information collected about the geography course, one will

be in a better position to answer the question, *"Is the course a good one?"* And one can make decisions about continuing the course, modifying it or dropping it. Evaluating is a process of determining what to expect from the course, of gathering information to show whether the course is meeting its goals, and then of using that information to make decisions about the course.

Are those new materials worth the money we spent?

The procedures used to evaluate instructional materials are similar to those described for evaluating a program -- defining the goal, collecting appropriate data, and using that information to make a decision. Let us take arithmetic as an example:

Why did the school buy the new arithmetic materials? Will they help students learn certain skills better? Which skills? Perhaps the decision to use new materials had something to do with methods -- materials that encourage students to work independently. The information to be collected will relate directly to the stated goals; data will show how well students are mastering the skills in

question, or how well the students are working independently. This information will permit decisions on how well the new materials are working -- whether or not they are meeting the goals that were set for them.

But, are they worth the money that had been spent? The answer to this question is essentially a value judgment. Since the materials have been evaluated to find out how well they are reaching their goals, one has the information on which to make a judgment in terms of costs.

Systematic evaluating can provide schools with data to help make intelligent decisions in purchasing instructional materials.

How good is our school program?

One can use the same techniques that have been described to evaluate a school: defining the goals, collecting appropriate data to show how well the goals are being met, and using that data to make decisions about the school.

"But don't all schools have the same goals? They teach reading,

writing, arithmetic -- and of course science, and Spanish ... well, foreign languages ... oh, and physical education, too -- a good physical fitness program is important -- and health ... drugs, alcohol and tobacco should be covered .... ecology is really important nowadays .... and decision-making -- students have a good course in that, and it's important for all the students to learn how to make decisions for themselves ... citizenship -- the schools share with parents the responsibility of training good citizens .... and good history courses go along with learning about democracy -- one would like the students to get more history .... and the English courses should be more practical -- if a student cannot write a good, clear business letter, what is the use of writing poetry? .... and they have to learn skills they can use when they get out of school -- does the school prepare them for the jobs they can get around here?...."

"Wait a minute -- do all schools have all those goals? And do they consider some of them more important than others?" Which ones do you want <u>your</u> school to spend the most time on?

The different emphases placed on goals set by schools will show which goals are more important. In one school, for example, students spend a great deal of time in activities related to ecology, which is incorporated into the science, social studies, home economics and health programs. Another school only includes ecology as one unit in its biology course. It is obvious that the first school ascribes much more emphasis on education in ecology than does the second.

The goals for the school should be based on the goals for the whole school system. Those will be broad, general statements of what one expects the school to accomplish. Ideally, the school system's goals will be decided by a group representative of the whole community -- parents, taxpayers, Board of Education, school personnel. Their statement of goals will be arranged in a priority order -- not only what they want the schools to accomplish, but what they consider most important.

An impossible task? Fortunately not. Project Evaluation of the Capitol Region Education Council is working with a number of communities, using proven techniques to define goals for the school system and to

rank them in order of importance.

The goals for the school will be more specific than the broad statements of goals for the community. They will, in turn, be used as the basis for stating even more precise goals for the different instructional programs in the school.

Good evaluation depends on careful statements of goals. If useful data are to be collected, they must relate directly to the goals for the school. One cannot determine how well the schools are doing unless he knows what is expected to be accomplished.

In gathering data to show how well the school's goals are being met, one goal at a time will be examined, probably beginning with the goals considered most important. Through an evaluation of the various programs in the school, a picture of the whole school program is drawn. Information is then available for decision-making -- about separate parts of the curriculum and about the relative emphases to be put on the school's programs.

Conclusion

It has been explained how educational evaluation can be used to find out how something or someone is doing --

* first, by determining what accomplishments are expected from a program (or a person); that is, by defining the goals;

* next, by gathering specific and appropriate information that is directly related to the stated goals;

* and then by using that information to make decisions -- not only about the degree of accomplishment, but also about making improvements where needed.

Project Evaluation of the Capitol Region Education Council offers assistance in designing and carrying out evaluations. It can help a school, or a school system in the application of good techniques; from the time it initiates planning, in specifying clearly the purpose of the evaluation, in defining goals, in collecting information, and in interpreting the data collected.

The same pattern of activities is used for whatever part of the school program one wishes to evaluate. The purpose remains the same, however -- to gather pertinent information to help make good decisions for the improvement of the school program. The improvement of education is the goal of educational evaluation.